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- **SACEI Newsletter up-
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namese or Vietnam-
ese-American culture.**

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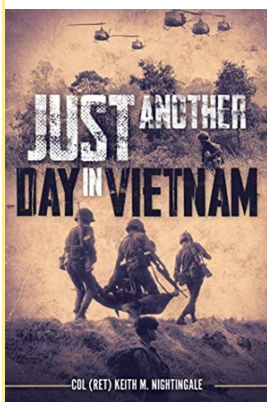
OCTOBER 2020



Just Another Day in Vietnam *Keith Nightingale*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VaShg1rkA1o>

One hour audio w/some photos. Col. Nightingale assigned as advisor to 52nd ARVN Ranger Battalion, a unit for which he greatly respect. Respect was earned at the battle of Suoi Long, described in some detail. This is recording of his discussion about the book. Nightingale recounts joint 52nd operations with US 11th ACR. Contains praise for Col. Nightingale's RVN counterpart, a major Hiep, a fearless leader with intense hatred for communists. As a young boy Hiep witnessed his father's executions at by communist Viet Minh in North Viet Nam. Hiep's unit fought to the very end in '75, with Hiep captured and ending up in a "reeducation" prison camp where he was executed for his defiance.

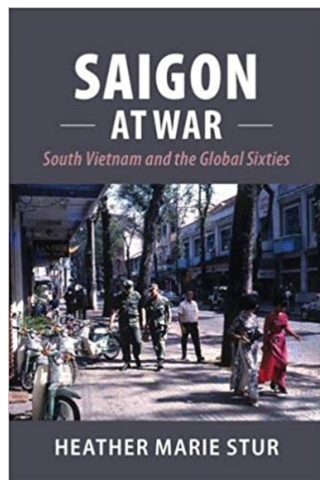


Col. Nightingale expresses, on several occasions, his admiration for RVNAF units, saying they were good, dedicated troops and do not deserve the contempt they received from news media and U.S. troops and units who never served with RVNAF.

Saigon at War *Heather Stur*

During South Vietnam's brief life as a nation, it exhibited glimmers of democracy through citizen activism and a dynamic press. South Vietnamese activists, intellectuals, students, and professionals had multiple visions for Vietnam's future as an independent nation.

Some were anticommunists, while others supported the National Liberation Front and Hanoi. In the midst of war, South Vietnam represented the hope and chaos of decolonization and nation building during the Cold War.



U.S. Embassy officers, State Department observers, and military advisers sought to cultivate a base of support for the Saigon government among local intellectuals and youth, but government arrests and imprisonment of political dissidents, along with continued war, made it difficult for some South Vietnamese activists to trust the Saigon regime. Meanwhile, South Vietnamese diplomats, including anticommunist students and young people who defected from North Vietnam, travelled throughout the world in efforts to drum up international support for South Vietnam.

Drawing largely on Vietnamese language sources, Heather Stur demonstrates that the conflict in Vietnam was really three wars: the political war in Saigon, the military war, and the war for international public opinion.

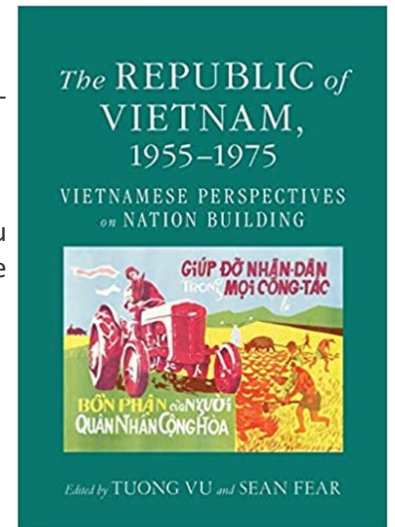
Disclaimer: The listing in this newsletter of a book title or a film does not mean endorsement or approval by SACEI.

The Republic of Vietnam: Vietnamese Perspectives on Nation Building

Tuong Vu, Sean Fear Through the voices of senior officials, teachers, soldiers, journalists, and artists, *The Republic of Vietnam, 1955–1975*, presents us with an interpretation of "South Vietnam" as a passionately imagined nation in the minds of ordinary Vietnamese, rather than merely as an expeditious political construct of the United States government.

The moving and honest memoirs collected, translated, and edited here by Tuong Vu and Sean Fear describe the experiences of war, politics, and everyday life for people from many walks of life during the fraught years of Vietnam's Second Republic, leading up to and encompassing what Americans generally call the "Vietnam War." The voices gift the reader a sense of the authors' experiences in the Republic and their ideas about the nation during that time.

The light and careful editing hand of Vu and Fear reveals that far from a Cold War proxy struggle, the conflict in Vietnam featured a true ideological divide between the communist North and the non-communist South.



Coronavirus reunion: A 50-year belated thanks to the man who saved my live in Vietnam

George C. Paine II, Opinion contributor

Sat, September 19, 2020, 5:00 AM EDT

<https://www.yahoo.com/news/coronavirus-reunion-50-belated-thanks-090016870.html>

Several months ago, my son asked me to send him a 1970 article that referred to my medical evacuation in Vietnam. The article was focused on the 247th Medical Detachment, Helicopter Ambulance, called a Dust Off, operating along the South China Sea.

It took some searching but I found and sent it. I realized, rereading it, that the five personnel mentioned — pilots and crew — were all from the South. The crew chief who mentioned my extraction was from Chattanooga, two hours down the road.

My son, who was in San Francisco, thought I should contact him and two days later he had located the crew chief, Bill Zinkeler, and had emailed him. Bill said in 50 years he had never met anyone he had combat airlifted out of the field.

Over almost 900 missions, that amounted to thousands of people: Americans, Vietnamese, Koreans, Australians and others. I was stunned by this and sent Bill a message saying I wanted to thank him for pulling me out of the boonies so long ago and was remiss for waiting 50 years to do so.

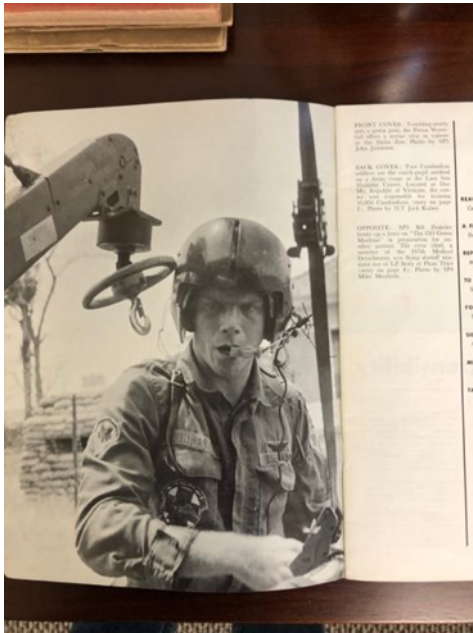
The helicopter pilots were heroic

On Aug. 13, 1970, as an infantry platoon leader, I had led a small group of 10 to 12 soldiers to check out a thatched

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hut that had recently been used by enemy soldiers in the scrub jungle between Phan Thiet and Phan Rang. As we entered the dwelling area, a booby trap was triggered and six of us were wounded. What follows an explosion like this is a period of chaos and uncertainty as one tries to deal with the situation from a tactical and medical standpoint. Once I regained consciousness, I had to set up a defensive perimeter, direct the medic, contact my company to come assist us, ask them to send a reaction force, and call for a Dust Off.



Dust Off Crew Chief Bill Zinkeler saved George Paine II's life in Vietnam.



At base camp LZ Betty in Vietnam

We loved the helicopter pilots and crews who we relied on for transportation, supplies of food and ammunition, gunship protection and removing us from the field if wounded. They were truly heroic, and the most courageous and inspiring were the unarmed Dust Off guys — their helicopters and they had no weaponry.

They would fly in to help those of us “on the ground” under the most dangerous situations with seemingly no thought of their own safety. We always knew we could call on them night or day, even in the monsoon rains, and they’d be there for us.

Aug. 13 was no exception. Within 20 minutes a “bird” was “on station” and preparing to land. Six of us were quickly loaded in the chopper and it took off. For me it was an odd and helpless feeling. I was in extreme pain and was leaving my platoon in possible immediate danger without an officer. Further I was trying to comfort and console the soldiers who had been air-lifted with me.

In spite of this, I had another thought while on my stretcher. We had a heavy load with six wounded men and it was taking us forever to get into the air. It seemed like we spent an enormous time flying low over the terrain trying to gain altitude.

So, I’m thinking, “This is great, I might possibly survive the booby trap only to be shot down in a helicopter flying way too low for my comfort.” It was actually comic relief to think of the absurdity of my thoughts.

In a previous war, we might have died

During the flight to the base camp, called LZ Betty, for triage that would be done by the only doctor there, I remember talking with this then unknown crew chief to get information from him. I have never forgotten how impressed I was with his concern, kindness and care for all of us, while in his own chaos he was handling his duties of looking after us.

He was coordinating with the pilots who couldn’t see behind them, and was in contact with the base camp, getting it prepared for a bird load of wounded. The doctor and the soldiers at the base camp would prepare for us based on his assessment.

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Coronavirus reunion...

At LZ Betty we were quickly removed from the helicopter and examined, and two of us were soon on our way to an evacuation surgical unit at Cam Ranh Bay. Remarkably, we had been picked up in the field within 20 minutes, examined within 30 minutes, delivered to a surgical unit within an hour and put on the operating table soon after.

In the Korean War and wars previous to it, we would have stood a real likelihood of not surviving.

COVID-19 meant we couldn't meet in person, but here's how we connected

I never forgot the crew chief and, when reconnected, I was delighted to hear of his successful life after the Army. Bill had returned to college and gotten his degree, spent 30 years with the Chattanooga Police Department, retired as a captain of the Investigative Services Division, and spent another 15 years as manager of the Civil Warrants Division for the Sheriff's Office.

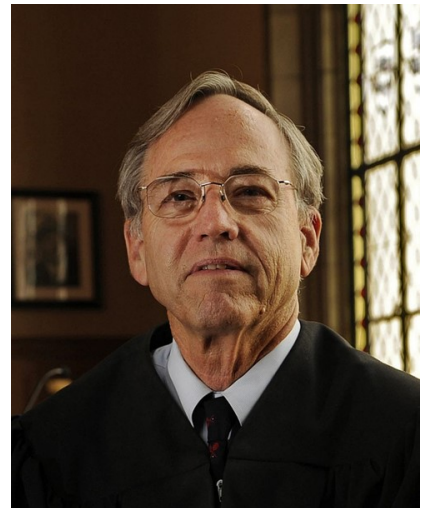
We have spoken by telephone and he answered questions that I had pondered over the decades. How did they get to me so quickly? Who flew me to Cam Ranh Bay? What was the difference in a Medevac and Dust off? (The latter didn't have machine guns and operated under the Geneva Convention.) I didn't even know I had gone to an Air Force hospital rather than an Army one. We had a great telephonic reunion, swapped tales and have since exchanged photographs.

However, what I was really looking forward to was getting together with Bill and his wife for lunch Aug. 13 at their house in Chattanooga on the 50th anniversary of his kindness towards me. Further, my wife and two sons who have lived with my Vietnam experience for four decades were eagerly anticipating the visit.

Unfortunately, Bill who has pulmonary issues was told by his primary physician that our reunion was too risky in this time of COVID-19 and it would have to be put off. We did, finally, see each other, but on a screen. We had a Zoom meeting Aug. 13 — exactly 50 years to the day after he cared for me and five others in a rescue the likes of which he carried out multiple times daily for soldiers and civilians, too.

It wasn't the reunion I had envisioned, but this was a wonderful substitute. We intend to get together in the flesh once the plague is over.

George C. Paine II of Nashville was a chief judge for the U.S. bankruptcy court, Middle District of Tennessee. He retired from the court in 2011. This column was originally published in the Tennessean.



Retired federal Judge George Paine II